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AUTHOR Work, William
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ABSTRACT

When children begin formal schooling, their fundamental communication skills, speaking and listening, are well developed but limited in scope and range; it becomes the teacher's task to assist the children in achieving communicative competence. A developmental project called "Developing Communicative Competence in Children" identifies four principal features of speech communication competence, each related to interactive behaviors in social contexts. These are: an available repertoire of experiences, the ability to make critical choices from that repertoire, implementation of suitable behaviors in performing desired tasks, and objective evaluation of performance behaviors. Instruction strategies can enhance functional communicative competence by observing the following principles: speech behaviors are highly personal, the rate of development varies in children, human interactions are dynamic, real life performance is the goal of communication, the interpretation and creation of messages must be child-centered, and communicative competence can be a challenge for all children, both gifted and handicapped. (MAI)

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# COMPETENCE IN SPEAKING AND LISTENING

William Work

AASA SUMMER CONFERENCE July 9, 1978 MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Thank you, Harold. That was a very kind introduction.

President Lyndon B. Johnson once said--after a particularly flattering introduction-- "Thank you. My father would have enjoyed it. My mother would have believed it."

It has often been said that introductions are usually made of people who need no introduction by people who do. Such is not the case today.

I'm not going to embarrass Professor Harold B. Allen by telling you that he has been:

President of the National Council of Teachers of English

President of the American Dialect Society

President of a third national organization related to the theme of this panel--

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

....and that it would take the rest of the morning to simply list his books and other scholarly publications on linguistics and related matters.

When Dr. Fenwick English of the AASA central office asked me what my speaking fee was, I said, $200. But then I said, for a prestigious AASA audience like those folks who will be gathering in Minneapolis in July, I'd be willing to pay $400!

It takes a lot of nerve to stand up in front of an audience of one--two--or three-- hundred and expect them to pay exclusive attention to you for fifteen or twenty minutes. It's enough to make a speaker take himself seriously--and get nervous. Lady Bird Johnson's former press secretary, Liz Carpenter, had her own prescription for dealing with speaker fright. Before going to the

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podium, she would remind herself that there are 800 million Chinese out there somewhere who neither know nor care about what she was about to say.

There's another reason for not taking one's self too seriously as a speaker. People don't listen. I'm told that the American Psychological Association carried out a study some years ago that revealed that, in a public speaking situation, on the average, only 28% of the audience are paying attention to the speaker. And they also found that, of the remaining 72%, almost half were entertaining erotic thoughts!

Now it's time to get serious. And since it's Sunday morning--and most of you are skipping church--like the old-fashioned preacher, I'm going to preface my remarks with three short texts:

The first is from the Old Testament, Judges, chapter 12, verse 6: "Then said they unto him, say now Shibboleth; and he said, Sibboleth, for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him and slew him."

And from the New Testament, Luke, chapter 19, verse 22: "Out of thine own mouth will I punish thee."

And finally, from the new New Testament, the National Elementary Principal, and in this case, the writer is U.S. Commissioner of Education, Ernest L. Boyer, who wrote:

"I believe that language is the centerpiece of education. It is basic to all basics. The sending and receiving of messages is the central social process whose form and sophistication....separate us from animals.

"I affirm the centrality of language not as an end in itself but as a vehicle by which all other education is conveyed, and as the mechanism by which all social encounters are sustained, and which gives us our identities and our meaning.

"Good writing and good speaking are simply the external aspects of good

thinking. Clear expression is our way of checking whether the complicated process of thinking is moving forward. And I should emphasize that the communication process goes far beyond the need to read and write, to speak clearly and connectedly, and to learn how to decode the messages of others.

"All of human knowledge is, in fact, embodied and conveyed in symbols, and even internal conversations within ourselves are mediated by the complex miracle of language. Communication is just a more specific name for consciousness. All we know, all we fear, and all we hope is created and conveyed through symbols."

Those, then are my texts. And like some old-fashioned preachers, I'll leave it to you to make the connection with what follows.

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With your indulgence, I would like, this morning, to attempt to place speaking and listening competence into the larger framework of what we are calling "communication literacy"; then I'd like to wrestle with you a little on what is meant by "competence"; and finally review some of the guidelines that have been suggested for cultivating functional competence in speaking and listening.

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We're here at this conference this morning.....

By the way, you know what a conference is: It's where people who should be <u>doing</u> something get together to <u>talk</u> about it.

Anyway, we're here not just to talk about the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, but to consider what Ernest Boyer calls "comprehensive literacy." An individual exhibits comprehensive literacy when he or she is <u>competent</u> and <u>comfortable</u> across a full spectrum of communication experiences-- from reading a serious literary work with

sensitivity and perception--or digesting an expert radio commentator's analysis of the probable impact of Proposition 13--or writing a clear, articulate biographical statement in support of a college application--or threading one's way through the myriad currents of information, persuasion, and entertainment that are American televsion--or defending one's conduct with a peer, parent, principal, or policeman--to a sharing of ideas and feelings, through conversation, with another human being.

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In one sense, the structure of this morning's panel does the topic of communication literacy a disservice. It suggests that reading, writing, speaking, listening, and visual literacy are, somehow, independent of one another. It suggests that the practice of teaching the English language arts as separate entities is appropriate. It may even suggest--to some--that the different modes and media of communication are functionally independent--even outside of the classroom--out there in the real world.

More and more, I believe--and I predict that my fellow panelists will support this--we are recognizing the dynamic, complex, interdependent nature of the communication processes through which human beings perceive and alter their environments--through which they relate to others--and through which they gain some notion of self-identity.

Preliterate humanoids, we presume, communicated in a physical, animal way--with fists and clubs and the baring of teeth. The "invention" of speech, of graphic representation, of writing and reading, of printing, of photography, and of instantaneous, world-wide electronic communications--each represented a quantum leap--presumably forward--in both our communication capacity and in the complexity of the available means of communication. As the agrarian society gave way to the industrial society, so the industrial society is

giving way to the information society. Already, we are told, in the United States, our economy is based more on information processing than on manufacturing. With each step-- with each technological and sociological change--greater demands are place on the individual for communicative competence as a survival skill. The kids who will be the adults in tomorrow's world will need all of today's skills, plus the ability to communicate comfortably with computers; plus the ability to communicate across a range of cultures; plus the ability to communicate in an environment of unparalleled conflict between the haves and the have-nots; plus the ability to defend communication rights and freedoms against increasing pressures from the left and the right and the middle. 1984 and Orwellian "Double-Speak"--if not already with us, are surely just around the corner.

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But I am here to talk more specifically about competence in speaking and listening. That the English language arts are functionally interrelated does not mean that they cannot be considered separately. The poet, T.S. Eliot put it neatly, when he said: "If we (were to) speak as we write, no one would listen; and if we (were to) write as we speak, no one would read."

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Speaking and listening are fundamental--both in the learning process and in the conduct of life itself. As Thomas Mann observed, "Speech is civilization itself. The word--even the most contradictory word--preserves contact. It is silence which isolates."

Speech is not only the fundamental mode of communication--from which all others derive--it is the predominant mode of communication. Data on this vary, but here are some of the estimates of how people divide up their

communication time:

| | |
|---|---|
| Listening and Viewing: | 45% |
| Talking | 30% |
| Reading | 16% |
| Writing | 9% |

Or, it has been said that the average person hears the equivalent of a novel in one day; speaks the equivalent of a novel in one week; reads the equivalent of a novel in one month; and writes the equivalent of a novel in one year.

Or---If a person were to live to the age of 100, he or she would have spent 1½ years writing, 4 3/4 years reading, 33 1/3 years sleeping, and 40 years in speaking/listening/viewing.

Someone once estimated that one listens 7 times as much as one speaks; one speaks 4 times as much as one reads; and one reads twelve times as much as one writes.

Although now a bit dated (1966), you might be interested in the findings of a study of the communication habits of a group of Chief School Officers. On the average, they deployed their communication time as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| On the telephone: | 7% |
| Interacting in groups of 6 or more: | 25% |
| Interacting in groups of 3-5: | 15% |
| Interacting with one other person | 20% |
| Speechmaking | 1% |
| Writing: | 5% |
| Reading: | 3% |
| Miscellaneous; unable to categorize: | 24% |

More important than the data--and not very precise data at that--is the fact that it is through our communicative relationships with other people--and most of them are speaking and listening--that we are able to enhance the rewards and minimize the punishments that life metes out to us all. It is through speech (and the underlying thought processes that it represents) that we cope with problems and frustrations on the one hand, and create and exploit opportunities on the other hand. Of all of the modes of communication, speech is pre-eminently the social mode.

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Most kids, when they begin their formal schooling, are unable to read or write. But they do have speaking and listening skills that are well-developed--if limited in scope and range. (As someone once said, children learn to speak at their mother's knee--and at other low joints.) Because spoken language is acquired "naturally" by most youngsters, and because the three R's are ordinarily not acquired, if not taught--there seems to be a notion abroad that proficiency in spoken communication will come about as a by-product of instruction in other areas. While this is true for some, there is a substantial body of evidence that supports our belief that structured experiences can help the young (and the not-so-young) to be better speakers and better listeners.

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When you think of a speech teacher, what comes to mind? You may think of (1) a speech therapist; (2) a debate coach; (3) a director of dramatics; (4) a teacher of public speaking; or, possibly, (5) a reluctant English teacher who is expected to be "some or all of the above." And let me hasten to add that some of the latter--with precious little formal training-- have done some remarkably good speech communication work with kids. But for another view of what is desirable in the way of professional staff for a

a strong program in the speech communication arts, may I refer you to a new publication of the Speech Communication Association and the American Theatre Association, entitled, "Preparation of Elementary and Secondary Teachers in Speech Communication and Theatre." (Cf. Publications Order Form)

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What is competence in speech communication, and how can the schools help kids to acquire it? Good questions!

What is competence? Now, there's a really good question, and one on which, as you know, there is a growing body of literature. Too much of that literature, I am afraid, is simplistic. Our love of categories and taxonomies leads us into all kinds of absurdities that have precious little to do with what makes people tick. As if it were possible--or profitable--to pigeon-hole behaviors as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor! (Sorry.)

According to some, competence has to do with the ability to act--to do--to perform. It is a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, experiences that permit one to accomplish a particular task. Some see "competence" as a lower level of achievement--as in minimal competency expectations--at least as lower than "effectiveness." According to this veiw, one can be communicatively competent, if one meets the minimal communicative demands of a situation, and, in so doing, exhibits socially acceptable behavior. (Larson, Backlund, Redmond, Barbour 1978). Effectiveness has to do with the success of the communicator in bringing about desired outcomes.

George O. Klemp has an interesting view of competence--particularly as it relates to the world of work. Says he

"A competency...is a generic concept that underlies the organization of skills and their effective application. For example, a person will not be an effective communicator, regardless of his or her speaking skill, if certain

competencies are lacking, such as the ability to conceptualize and think logically, needed to define and organize a presentation, or the ability to influence the audience. But the same competencies that underlie specific communication skills are the foundation of many other skills as well; thus the power of generic competencies exceeds that of skills and even that of a specific knowledge base."

To this view of competence, James H. Block adds that competent individuals are not only successful managers of their environments, but they acquire feelings of self-confidence--of self-sufficiency--of self-mastery--in the bargain. The ability to manage one's own symbolic environment--both the internal environment of thinking and conceptualizing--and the external environment of verbal and nonverbal messages received from others and directed to others-- surely this competence is at the heart of any holistic view of human competence.

There are many views on what constitutes speaking and listening competence. A task force organized by our organization has recently produced a document that sets forth one view of minimal speaking and listening competencies for high school graduates. Without getting into any of the limitations or pitfalls or controversies about the minimal competency movement, here are some of the abilities that our task force has prescribed. In each case, I'll give the competency and one functional example of its application.

COMMUNICATION CODES

A. Listen effectively to spoken English. UNDERSTAND A DOCTOR'S DIRECTIONS FOR TAKING A PRESCRIBED MEDICATION.

B. Use words, pronunciation and grammar appropriate for a given situation. USE APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE DURING EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS.

C. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for the situation. USE APPROPRIATE FACIAL EXPRESSION AND TONE OF VOICE IN CONVERSING WITH A SUPERVISOR.

D. Use voice effectively. SPEAK WITH APPROPRIATE RATE, VOLUME, AND CLARITY WHEN EXPRESSING YOUR VIEWS TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL BY PHONE.

ORAL MESSAGE EVALUATION

A. Identify main ideas in messages. IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS IN BROADCAST MESSAGES ABOUT TAX RETURN PREPARATION.

B. Distinguish facts from opinion. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN EVIDENCE AND OPINION IN TESTIMONY.

C. Distinguish between informative and persuasive messages. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN INFORMATIVE AND PERSUASIVE MESSAGES ABOUT NON-PRESCRIPTION DRUGS.

D. Identify biases in messages. IDENTIFY MANAGEMENTS BIASES IN RESPONSES TO UNION REQUESTS.

E. Recognize when another does not understand your message. RECOGNIZE WHEN A CUSTOMER DOESN'T UNDERSTAND YOUR DIRECTIONS FOR PRODUCT USE.

BASIC ORAL SKILLS

A. Express ideas clearly and concisely. DESCRIBE AN ACCIDENT OR CRIME TO A POLICEMAN.

B. Express and defend with evidence your point of view. EXPRESS AND DEFEND YOUR REFUSAL TO ACCEPT PRODUCTS OR SERVICES YOU DIDN'T ORDER.

C. Organize messages so that others can understand them. EXPLAIN TO YOUR CHILD HOW TO PREVENT ACCIDENTS, USING A CAUSE-EFFECT PATTERN.

D. Ask questions to obtain information. OBTAIN SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR JOB PERFORMANCE.

E. Answer questions effectively. ANSWER TAX AUDITOR'S QUESTIONS.

F. Give concise and accurate directions. GIVE DIRECTIONS TO ANOTHER ABOUT

THE PROCEDURES NECESSARY TO VOTE.

G. Summarize messages. SUMMARIZE THE POSITION OF A POLITICAL CANDIDATE ON A CAMPAIGN ISSUE.

HUMAN RELATIONS

A. Describe another's point of view. DESCRIBE THE VIEWPOINT OF A RETAIL STORE MANAGER TO WHOM YOU ARE RETURNING MERCHANDISE.

B. Describe differences of opinion. DESCRIBE DIFFERENCES IN OPINION IN A ZONING HEARING.

C. Express feelings to others appropriately. EXPRESS APPROPRIATELY FEELINGS OF APPROVAL TO YOUR CHILD FOR HIS/HER SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT.

D. Perform social rituals appropriately. INTRODUCE STRANGERS TO ONE ANOTHER.

Our organization recently completed a developmental project that was supported in part by the Axe -Houghton Foundation, the report of which is a book called DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN CHILDREN. This study identified four principal features of speech communication competence, each related to interactive behaviors is social contexts. (Here I'm quoting from a summary prepared by one of the directors of the project.)

"1) The exercise of competence depends upon an available repertoire of experiences. To be flexible communicators, children must be capable of performing a wide range of communication acts required by their social environment.

2) The exercise of competence requires that the individual make critical choices from that repertoire. Taking into consideration the relevant characteristics of the communication context--participants, topic, task, setting, and preceding events--children select from their repertoire of strategies those which they perceive to be the most appropriate for the specific situation at a given

moment in time.

3) The exercise of competence is revealed when suitable behaviors are brought to bear in performing desired tasks. Having determined a strategy to use in a given communication context, children must be willing to carry that strategy into action. Through implementation, children experience themselves using verbal and nonverbal behaviors designed to accomplish a given intent.

4) Competence is sustained when individuals are able to evaluate their performance behaviors objectively. Having performed a communication act, children must evaluate their communication behaviors in terms of its appropriateness to the communication context and its interpersonal effectiveness--that is, satisfaction to the child and to others."

Recognizing the arbitrariness of behavioral taxonomies, the project identified five main functional clusters which embrace the principal uses of spoken communication in our society. These functions are:

1) Efforts to control the behavior of others: persuading, suggesting, commanding, permitting, etc.

2) The expression of feelings and attitudes.

3). Giving or seeking information.

4) Ritualizing: performance of the routine social amenities--the hello s the goodbye's and the how-are-you's,

5) Imagining: the creative, inventive, fantasizing, speculating, dramatizing exploratory functions,

We have much to learn about how to enhance functional communicative competence through instruction. We have reasonable confidence that instructional strategies should be designed, however, in keeping with the following underlying principles:

1) Speech behaviors are highly personal, idiosyncratic, and very important in the determination of an individual's self-image. There are guidelines through which competence can be encouraged; but there are no absolute standards of correctness.

2) Instruction should be consonant with what we know about the development of functional communicative competence. We know, for one thing, that it doesn't develop in the same way and at the same rate in all kids.

3) Instruction should stress the dynamic, interactive, process nature of human interactions.

4) It should stress performance--the ability to accomplish communication goals in real-life situations.

5) Instruction should be child-centered and should embrace both the interpretation and the creation of messages.

6) All kids should have the opportunity to extend their communicative abilities--not just those who are severely handicapped--not just those who are severely gifted.

7) A major goal whould be to help all kids to be able to face the challenges communicative competence confidently.

A few years ago, an independent research agency did a study of adult fears--phobias. The fear that disturbed the most people was not death, or sickness, or high places, or inflation, or Republican administrations--but fear of speaking before a group.

8) And we should not forget the ethics of communication. As a committee of one of our regional organizations put it:

"The ultimate purpose of instruction in speech is to help people of good will make truth prevail. This is accomplished through instruction in the logical analysis of controversy, collecting and evaluating evidence, proper reasoning, clear organization of thought, the ethics needed in any communicative situation, audience analysis, clear and artistic use of language, methods of presentation, and criteria for critical listening and evaluation..."

We also have much to learn about the assessment of functional communicative competence. Paper and pencil tests are of limited utility. Some aspects of functional communication are easy to measure: hearing acuity, sound production and articulation, and so on. But to measure "effectiveness" in an interview or "appropriateness" in a job-related discussion is something else again. The National Assessment program and SCA have undertaken a very preliminary study directed toward adding speaking and listening assessment to their program. We also have a new ERIC book, ASSESSING FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION, that reviews the literature of testing spoken communication and describes 90 specific testing instruments that are presently available.

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Enough. I hope that I have persuaded you to take a close look at instruction in the spoken language arts in your school system. I hope you will ask yourselves who--and with what preparation--is teaching what, to whom, how, when, and with what effect.

The late Robert Maynard Hutchins said it well in an article a few years ago in support of public education entitled, "The Schools Must Stay". Wrote he:

"The barbarism, 'communication skills,' which is the contemporary jargon for reading, writing, figuring, speaking and listening, appears to have permanent relevance. These arts are important in any society at any time. They are more important in a democratic society than in any other, because the citizens of a democratic society have to understand one another. They are indispensable in a world community: they are arts shared by people everywhere. Without them the individual is deprived; and the community, too. In a technical age, these are the only techniques that are universally valuable; they supply the only kind of vocational training a school can offer that can contribute to vocational success. They are the indispensable means to learning anything. They have to be learned if the individual hopes to expand his individuality or if he proposes to become a self-governing member of a self-governing community. Learning these arts cannot be left to the choices of children or their parents."

And finally, I liked the way Seymour Yesner concluded his mini-essay recently in the ENGLISH JOURNAL--entitled THE BASICS AND THE BASIC VALUE OF HUMAN BEINGS. Wrote he:

"The methods for teaching literacy must employ joy, inquiry, openness, appreciation of difference and divergence, of ambiguity and paradox or the literacy we achieve will be rote, mechanical and subservient to rules and order. In my view, these latter achievements would be the 'literacy' of machines, a literacy hardly worth the price of an education and hardly identifiable as the behavior of human beings.

And lest we take ourselves too seriously, let's remember the immortal words of that immortal national treasure, W.C. Fields, who said: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit. No use being a damn fool about it!"